



December 20, 2004

Dear Colleagues:

The past year has been one of tremendous achievement for ORION. I'd like to take this opportunity to bring you up to date with a few highlights on what has been accomplished and what some of our priorities are for the next year or so.

### **The ORION Network**

Over the past year, ORION became fully operational, connecting Ontario research and education organizations to the network in 21 cities throughout the Province – from Thunder Bay and Timmins, to Ottawa and Windsor, and points between. ORION's 4,200 km fibre optic telecommunications network was completed on target and within budget.

Today, our world-leading, ultra high-speed network provides a competitive advantage to Ontario research and education (R&E) institutions --- a lead that enhances our opportunities for innovation. With over 60 institutions and organizations connected, ORION links the main campuses of all Ontario's universities, several teaching hospitals, 19 colleges of applied arts and technology, and other research and learning facilities, including several school boards, to one another, and to R&E institutions across Canada and around the world.

Ontario's researchers, educators and learners can now conduct collaborative research and education activities and projects at a scale and intensity not attainable before. The platform is in place. And we are starting to build on it.

### **Outreach**

Through workshops, seminars, conferences, briefings and presentations to research and education colleagues throughout the Province, we began an extensive outreach program to identify how the exceptional new capabilities of the ORION network and its connections to the global grid of R&E networks can advance learning and new discoveries in Ontario. Hundreds of individuals committed time to participate in these sessions.

Our first Ontario R&E Summit last June set the stage for an ongoing annual dialogue with Ontario's research and education community about how high-speed R&E networks like ORION can support their work. Participants say they look forward to future Summits to highlight their best practices and share lessons learned with colleagues about collaborations and inter-disciplinary approaches to learning and discovery.

Our monthly e-newsletter, which highlights R&E activities and innovators, continues to be circulated widely across a broad spectrum of research and education interests, including those in government and industry.

### **Strategic Alliances**

ORION struck a very creative partnership with the SHARCNET computational "grid" project that is propelling Ontario's computational power for scientific discovery and learning to new levels. The ORION network will connect computer clusters and data storage facilities among the 11 participating Ontario postsecondary institutions at light speed, supporting the creation of a major new force for research and analysis across many disciplines in Ontario.

The relationship with the Government of Ontario, a key contributor towards building the ORION network, was very positive and supportive during the past year as ORION moved to operational self-sustainability. Provincial support enabled ORION to assist connection costs to ORION for over 45 postsecondary institutions and teaching hospitals.

We collaborated closely with CANARIE --- Canada's acknowledged global leader in next generation R&E networking --- to bring the benefits of advanced networking knowledge and capabilities to Ontario. ORION connected many of our research and postsecondary institutions to CANARIE's CA\*net 4 national R&E network for the very first time this year.

ORION is committed to strengthening relations with R&E colleagues across Canada. In the past year, we played a key role in creating a new relationship among provincial R&E networks through the R&E Networks of Canada. This coast-to-coast group is dedicated to sharing knowledge and best practices to help drive innovation across our country.

We also struck new alliances with partners around the Great Lakes. ORION signed collaboration agreements with RISQ, our neighbouring R&E network in Quebec, as well as with the Michigan-based Merit research and education

network. A similar agreement is being discussed with NYSErnet in New York. The new telecommunications connections between our networks will support major research collaborations in a broad range of fields between R&E institutions and researchers in Ontario, Quebec, Michigan and New York. These connections will be of immense strategic value to Ontario and our relationships with our neighbours in Canada and across the border as we build our 21<sup>st</sup> Century innovation-based economy.

### **Moving Forward**

As we look back over the past year and measure the tangible impact of ORION on our province's research, scientific and education community, we recognize that much still needs to be done. We have only scratched the surface. Working together, we can build an Ontario for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century that exhibits innovation and excellence in research, teaching and learning --- an Ontario that is known widely as a highly competitive knowledge economy powerhouse.

To achieve full value from ORION, we are shifting our concentration from building the network to a major focus on establishing its extensive capabilities as a vital tool for innovation and knowledge generation in Ontario. We will accelerate our efforts to reach out and spark new and innovative uses of the network. We will work with researchers, educators and learners to discover new opportunities for productive collaborations with each other and with other institutions of research and higher learning throughout Ontario, Canada and around the world. We will strive to increase the knowledge resources and applications available over ORION. We will listen to our research and education colleagues to ensure that ORION is on track in meeting your needs. ORION will be a value-added partner.

I would like to thank all those people, public institutions, and private sector partners that have contributed to building Ontario's world-leading ORION R&E network infrastructure. It is a wonderful commitment to Ontario's future.

I also want to thank Dr. Ross Paul, President of the University of Windsor, for his leadership and support as founding Chair of the Board during our crucial start-up phase. Ross helped us turn a vision into a reality and kept our focus on results and outcomes.

At our December Board meeting, Dr. Stan Shapson, VP of Research and Innovation at York University, took on the Board Chair responsibilities. I look forward to working with Stan and the Board as we push to accelerate innovative research and education collaborations over ORION.

Maxim Jean-Louis, President/CEO of Contact North/Contact Nord, is the new Vice-Chair, and Brian Desbiens is the new Treasurer.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the entire staff here at ORION, I wish you and your family the very best wishes over the holiday season.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Phil Baker', written in a cursive style.

Phil Baker, President and CEO